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Edward,

By the Grace of God and Favor of the Apostolic See,

Bishop of Saint John,

*To the Clergy, Religious Orders and Laity of
the Diocese:*

Health and Benediction in the Lord.

DEAR BRETHREN :

The first and most essential duty of man is to worship his Creator. Reason and revelation require that we should set apart some particular time for this important duty. Considering that we are on earth to know and serve God and that He has a strict right to every moment of our lives, we must admit that He asks but very little of our time for His exclusive worship. But because He does ask so little, it would seem that He designedly calls attention to one of His commandments by prefacing it with the emphatic word *remember*. As if to say: One day out of seven I request for myself; this day I want. Remember that thou keep it holy.

This particular day before the coming of Christ was Saturday, but, under the Christian law, the Church, guided by the Holy Ghost, changed the day to Sunday, thus making it of obligation for us to sanctify the first day of the week instead of the last. It was on a Sunday that our Blessed Saviour arose from the dead; on a Sunday, too, the Holy Ghost descended upon the Apostles, the new faith was for the first time published to the world, and the Christian Church began its mission. It was, therefore, fitting

in honor of these events, and because the Old Law had been replaced by the New, that Sunday should be set apart as a day especially consecrated to God, and that it should be observed as a day of rest, of worship and of religious duties.

To sanctify the Sunday we are first of all commanded to abstain from all unnecessary servile work. By servile works we mean those laborious, corporal works which are usually done by laborers and mechanics; in a word, all those works which require the powers of the body more than the faculties of the mind, and whose particular end is gain. Works of a liberal nature which have for their object the cultivation of the mind, such as reading and writing, are permitted. All unnecessary manual labor is prohibited, not that we may spend our Sundays in idleness, much less in excess, or in sinful and dangerous amusements, but because such labor is apt to draw the mind away from God and hinder the religious exercises which He, through His Church, exacts on that day. In the Old Law, rest from servile work was strictly enjoined by the Almighty. "Thus saith the Lord: Take heed to your souls and carry no burdens on the sabbath-day, . . . neither do ye any work: sanctify the sabbath-day as I commanded your fathers." —Jer. XVII. 21, 22.

There was a good and wise reason for the sabbath and its ceremonial strictness under the law of Moses. Had there been no such day, man would have been prone to forget his Creator and to live for the world alone, thinking of little else than pleasure and gain. But the Sabbath served to remind him of his duty; it was the day which had to be kept holy to the Lord. "I gave them my sabbaths to be a sign between me and them: and that they might know that I am the Lord that sanctifies them." —Ezech. XX, 12.

We Christians have something more to be thankful for than had the Jewish people of old. We have greater reason to honor God and more to remind us of our obligations; therefore, of us also it is to be expected that, at least one day out of every seven, we quit our worldly occupations, that we leave the plow in the

furrow, the harvest in the field, our wares in the market or store, our machinery or tools in the factory; and, entering into our churches, we turn our minds and hearts to God Who promises the blessings of the earth and the heavens to those who obey His holy law.

The profanation of the Sunday, besides being a very great sin, carries with it many misfortunes. No one can despise and mock the law of God without incurring His anger. The man who labors on Sunday, and who tries, apart from God and religion, to better his condition, will never be successful. The Sunday's rest is necessary even ~~for~~ humane and economic reasons. Experience shows that constant drudgery wears out the health and strength of the laborer, deprives him of the opportunity to improve his mind, makes him a slave of passion and excess, and, in the end, blots out every vestige of religion from his soul. The more the Lord's day is dishonored by servile labor, the greater will be the degradation and brutalization of the human race.

We must not forget, however, that there are times when work performed on Sunday does not constitute a profanation of that day; for example, when such work is done in cases of urgent necessity, or when the interest of religion, or charity towards our neighbor requires it. From the Gospel we learn that our Lord frequently rebuked the over-strictness of the Pharisees who would not permit even a deed of mercy to be done on the Sabbath day, but who had introduced a system of burdensome regulations while the higher purpose of the Sabbath was lost sight of. Our Lord would have us remember that "the Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath."

While we should be careful to avoid sin at all times, we must bear in mind that it carries with it a special degree of malice when committed on Sunday. There can be no greater outrage than that of employing in the service of the devil the very day that our Creator has marked as peculiarly His own. Consequently, intemperance, debauchery or anything else that tends to make the Lord's day a day of revelry or scandal cannot be too strongly condemned.

The chief duty by which we are commanded to sanctify the Sunday, —and when we speak of the Sunday we mean also holydays of obligation,—is assisting at the holy sacrifice the of Mass. This is an obligation imposed by the Church on all Catholics, binding them under the pain of mortal sin as soon as they have attained the use of reason. When the Church makes a precept such as this, it has the very same force as if it came from the lips of our Lord Himself. Every act of her legislative power is ratified by divine authority. "He who heareth you, heareth me."—Luke X, 16. "Whatsoever thou shalt bind upon earth, it shall be bound also in heaven."—Matt. XVI, 19.

It requires a serious reason to excuse a Catholic from mortal sin in omitting to hear Mass on Sunday. Serious reasons are illness, greatness of distance from the church, the performance of some very pressing or important duty which cannot be delayed or discharged at another time, or some moral impossibility.

The man who remains away from Mass on Sunday or on a holyday of obligation without a grave reason is always an occasion of scandal to the rest of his parish. It is a clear proof, if proof were wanted, that he does not understand, or, understanding, he does not care for this supreme act of worship which we offer our Creator. Brethren, who that seriously reflects on what the Mass really is can be so careless, so indevout as to absent himself from our churches on Sunday? The Mass is the sacrifice of our Lord's Body and Blood offered up under the appearance of bread and wine upon our altars. It is the repetition not merely in loving remembrance, not merely in holy symbol, but in literal truth and efficacy of the self-same offering He made on the Cross. Whether Mass be said in the most gorgeous temple with sublime music for its accompaniment and all the pomp of art and ritual to give it splendor, or in the heart of some lonely forest, or in the dingy slums of some foul city and stripped of every outward beauty, in its essence it is always the same, and it is to our Lord as precious as His own Blood, as sacred as His death, as efficacious as His passion. How the most tender heart of Christ must yearn to see

us gathered around the altar when this mystery is being celebrated! Having paid no less than His whole humanity offered up in the painful throes of an awful passion and death to give the Mass its efficacy, how He must desire to see us prize and take to the full the boundless and admirable treasure it contains for us!

"The Mass is a great action," says Newman, "the greatest action that can be on earth. It is not the invocation merely, but, if I may dare use the word, the evocation of the Eternal. It is the only sacrifice that is worthy of God, dear brethren; the only means by which we can offer Him a fitting worship. "If we look at creation," says Faber, "we shall find it owing God four infinite debts; not one of which it could ever pay. It owes God infinite praise because of His boundless perfections, infinite thanksgiving because of His innumerable mercies, infinite expiation because of its innumerable sins, and infinite petition because of its endless necessities. Intelligent creation multiplied a thousandfold could not pay any one of these infinite obligations, but the sacrifice of the Mass pays them all a thousand times a day, and each single Mass superabundantly and supereminently." On the altar, during the august sacrifice, Jesus is offered to His heavenly Father, with all the infinite merits of His passion and death, for the four great ends just mentioned.

Who that realizes this can remain unappreciative or ungrateful? Surely if our Divine Redeemer goes so far as to immolate Himself thus for love of us, the least we can do is to show our appreciation of that love by being present at the adorable sacrifice. If any favor in the way of money or pleasure were so easily gotten, what crowds would come to our churches even on week-day mornings! But now faith has grown cold, and the Church has to use force to ensure that obedience which love fails to elicit by commanding all, under the pain of sin, to assist at Mass at least on Sundays. Thank God, however, the Catholics in this diocese who deliberately absent themselves are, relatively, very few; but, as long as there are any at all, it is a matter of the deepest concern to us whom God has charged with their spiritual welfare.

"A man who continues to go to Mass," remarks a noted writer, "is within hailing distance of grace, and the Church can still call him in. But when he gives up Mass, he parts company with the Church forever. When our Saviour spoke of the lost sheep, He said: I am the Good Shepherd. I know mine and mine know me; they hear my voice. As long as a man is within hearing of the voice of Jesus Christ, so long is there hope for his return. A man may not listen to the voice of Christ during the week; he may not hear the voice of his conscience in the morning or the evening; he may neglect everything during the six days of the week, but, on Sunday morning when the Church speaks and the voice of the Good Shepherd calls, if he comes to Mass there is hope for him. The history of catholicism demonstrates as clearly as anything can be demonstrated that the last act of apostasy, the act which severs forever the Catholic soul from Jesus Christ is the deliberate and final act of turning away from the altar and from Mass on Sunday."

It is not our purpose to speak to you in this Letter on the manner in which Mass should be heard. From childhood you have been taught that mere bodily presence thereat is not sufficient, but you should assist at it with great attention and devotion, trying to bring home to yourselves, as intimately as possible, the meaning of the sacred rite, and joining with the priest in offering up the adorable Victim to God.

We cannot too strongly denounce the conduct of some careless Catholics who are in the habit of coming late to Mass, thus disedifying and distracting the rest of the congregation. Such lack of punctuality is evidently due to sloth. Our people should remember that Mass in all its essential parts must be heard, and that a mortal sin can very easily be committed by neglecting to hear one of its principal parts. The congregation should endeavor to be in the church some minutes before Mass begins. These minutes could very profitably be employed in preparing your minds and hearts to assist at the holy sacrifice. Though the choice of a church where you are to hear Mass be left to yourselves,

it is much to be desired that you hear it, whenever possible, in your own parish church where the good example of your presence may be needed, where the pastor offers the Mass for the spiritual and temporal welfare of his own flock, where announcements affecting the parish are made, and where the pastor has the gratification of knowing that his people comply with the law of the church.

For the further sanctification of the Lord's day, we earnestly exhort you to approach the sacraments of Penance and the Eucharist, also to assist at Vespers and at Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament, to read moral and pious books, and perform, when opportunity permits, the spiritual and corporal works of mercy. Always remember the sacredness of the Sunday, its importance in the eyes of God, its necessity and utility for yourselves. It is by serving God diligently on that day that we draw down an abundance of graces upon ourselves for the rest of the week, and that we render Sunday an image of that eternal day which we hope to spend in the kingdom of heaven.

We strongly recommend the faithful to redouble their prayers during this holy season for the deliverance of the world from the evils of war and for the establishment of God's servants everywhere in the peace and safety of His protection.

The Reverend Clergy will read this Pastoral to their congregations on the first Sunday after its reception.

Given at St. John on the Feast of the Purification of the Blessed Virgin, February 2nd 1918.

† E. A. LEBLANC,
Bishop of Saint John.

WM. M. DUKE,
Chancellor.